

“Peace”

Sermon for 4 December 2016

Second Sunday in Advent

Texts: Romans 5:1-2 & Philippians 4:6-7

Romans 5:1. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Philippians 4:5-7: 5 Let your reasonableness [gentleness] be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It’s all about relationship. Yes, relationship with God first and foremost. This is the urgent need of man. This is what Jesus came to address and to rectify. He came to close the breach, heal the break, mend the dislocation brought about by sin. He achieved that through sacrifice and forgiveness. The result? Justification.

Justified by faith, that is, justified by *faith in Jesus Christ* as Savior, Redeemer, Lord and King, we obtain the benefits of justification. We are *counted* as righteousness in spite of sin and regardless of our history of rebellion and unrighteousness. No one is more saved (or justified) than anyone else and while there are degrees of reward in heaven, comparative depravity is a non-starter for believers here and now. It is faith and not deserving, performing or earning; not family, position or power that counts. And by this *saving faith* that we are pacified to God; He makes peace with us. That was His plan undertaken at His initiative: **We love because God first loved us!** (1 John 4:19) To be reconciled to God is to be justified.

This having been accomplished for us, we are left to pursue peace for the glory of God. To do that we have several personal steps to take: 1. get to know the God who comes near (this truth is the gist of biblical prophecy—the goal of Christ’s coming is laid out in the word)—the relational piece; 2. expect, or anticipate the better manna (meaning the right manna at the right time in just the right measure)—this earnest expectation is our hope as well as the source of our peace; and 3. learn to walk in humility. This last means without pride, in a clear

awareness of our weakness, our destitution, our utter dependency on the grace, goodness and provision of God Almighty. He who wishes to please God must not only believe that He is, he must also live trustingly. Again, the word instructs us in the trustworthiness of God: God always comes through, God keeps covenant with us, God never walks back on His promises. Peace comes with the realization of how much of this is Godward. God is the God of our future *if we are to have one . . . and if we do not have a future here, we are assured that we have a future beyond*. Yes, the place that Christ has gone and prepared for us must bring peace of mind: we have a known destination, we have a place reserved and we have a relationship that will never be severed. Nothing in heaven, hell or upon the earth can interfere with the plan God has for us to be with Him forever.

And peace in this world is secured by those who know, by virtue of their believing relationship in the Prince of Peace, the promised peace of the next. When we walk in that, our lives bring glory to God. And that is the point is it not?

I close by looking more closely at Philippians 4. The reason we can not be anxious is stated in verse 5: **The Lord is at hand**. His presence secures us. He hears, He has come close, He is standing with us—yes, He is in relationship with us. That brings us full circle does it not? Abiding in His Word, prayer and worship are preventative steps—fortifying activities. Jesus reminds that God is entirely with all His people, everywhere and all the time. He has shown up. Now it is up to us to show up, too. He gives us what we need, when we need it.

When the people were blessed with manna in the wilderness, even there we find a test of obedience: collect only what you need, don't store or hoard—the one exception is God's own Sabbath preparation: everything you need to enjoy the Sabbath will be provided the day before. At the end of the day, the manna box should be empty. Do not try to live your todays on yesterday's manna. It will only make you anxious. The opposite of anxiety is indeed hope, a hope that is an assurance. What assurance? That God is the same yesterday, today and forever. We depend on Him but He, thank goodness, doesn't depend on us. He remains God, His will is inviolate. He is firm, un-deterrable; yes, worthy of our trust. If you chose to be content to be human, I can assure God will be happy to remain God.

Amen